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POISON.

A ~ FARCE ~ IN ~ ONE ~ SCENE
FOR FOUR FEMALES.

Adapted by MARGUERITE MORTON.



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POISON.

A FARCE IN ONE SCENE.

ADAPTED BY MISS MARGUERITE MORTON.

CHARACTERS.

HATTIE, an invalid. ANNA, a friend of Hattie and Kate.
KATE, her sister. JANE, a housemaid.

SCENE. A prettily furnished sitting-room. KATE and JANE discovered arranging shawls and pillows in a large easy-chair.

KATE. A little more to this side, Jane—there, that's better. My sister is so sensitive that it would make her nervous if the shawl were crooked.

JANE. Yes, indeed, Miss Kate, she is the most nervous person I ever saw. If I speak above a whisper she says, "Oh, my nerves!" If the door-bell rings she says, "Oh, my nerves!" It must be hard to be so very sensitive.

KATE. Now the pillow for her back—not that one, the little one.

[Enter ANNA, at first unperceived by the others, whose proceedings she watches with manifest disapproval.]

KATE. Now get the footstool. Where is the fan? Ah, good morning, Anna.

ANNA. Good morning. What are you doing? Humoring Hattie's notions as usual? Oh, Kate, you make me tired! [Takes off hat and lays it on table.]

KATE. Notions? Oh, Anna! you ought to see her.

JANE. Indeed, Miss Anna, you should just hear her. [Imi-

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tates.] "Oh, my poor nerves! Oh, my head! Oh, my back!"
[*Aside to ANNA, laughing.*] Oh, my goodness me!

ANNA. Well, I have plenty of sympathy for real suffering, but I confess I haven't much use for hypochondria. You needn't look so shocked, Kate. You know as well as I do that Hattie would be as well as either you or I if she could only be made to think herself so.

KATE. Well, I have sometimes thought that if she would take more exercise and—and exert herself a little more, perhaps it might be better for her.

ANNA. Of course it would.

KATE. But who is to suggest such a thing to her? It would hurt her feelings terribly if she thought we did not sympathize with every whim.

JANE. Indeed, I wouldn't want to be the one to break it to her!

ANNA. Kate, I have a brilliant scheme! I believe I can cure your sister and prove to her that half her troubles are imaginary.

KATE [*doubtfully*]. Is it mind cure?

ANNA. Not exactly. There, she is calling you. Just leave it to me, and don't be surprised or frightened by anything that happens.

KATE [*anxiously*]. It isn't hypnotism?

ANNA. No, no! Nor electricity—nor anything at all dangerous. Don't you worry. [*Exit KATE.*] Now, Jane, can you get me two little bottles and some water and vinegar and sugar?

JANE. Yes, Miss Anna, but what in the world—

ANNA. I am going to concoct a deadly poison, Jane, vinegar and water, and a speedy antidote, Jane, sugar and water. The first I shall administer to Hattie by mistake, mind you, and I'll wager anything that she will imagine she suffers all the symptoms of real poisoning. I will leave the antidote on the table in the hall, and you must be ready to run and get it when I give the word. When that is administered, Hattie will be sure to recover immediately, and we can then tell her of the joke that has been played upon her. I think she can safely be trusted to draw a moral for herself.

JANE. And you won't give her anything but the water and the vinegar? [Laughing.]

ANNA. Not a thing!

JANE [with growing delight]. And you'll make her think she's poisoned?

ANNA. Just that, Jane. I'll have her walking up and down this room as fast as you can, in a few moments.

JANE. Really, Miss Anna? Oh, it will be a fine sight! [Laughing heartily.]

ANNA. I hear them coming. She must not know I have been here. Where are the vials? [Picking up hat.]

JANE. You'll find some old homeopathic bottles on the pantry shelf.

ANNA. Just the thing! [Exit ANNA.]

[Enter HATTIE and KATE, HATTIE leaning on her sister's arm and walking very feebly. JANE instantly assumes a serious expression and assists in placing HATTIE in the chair, adjusting pillows, fanning her, etc.]

KATE. There, Hattie, do you feel any better? Is the room warm enough? Jane, draw the curtain closer, please.

HATTIE [faintly]. Oh, it is suffocating, already! Jane, can't you step more lightly? You know how the least noise distresses me. [JANE tiptoes around. Door-bell rings. Exit JANE.] Oh, my poor nerves!

[Enter ANNA followed by JANE.]

KATE [shaking hands]. Good morning, Anna.

ANNA. Good morning. [Kisses her.] It is an age since I saw you last! [JANE laughs behind HATTIE's chair. ANNA lays small satchel on table and advances to HATTIE.] Good morning, Hattie. Why, how ill you look! It distresses me to see you so poorly. Aren't you any better!

HATTIE. But little. I am very feeble this morning. Kate had to almost carry me in here.

KATE. Yes, she seemed scarcely able to stand alone.

JANE. Indeed, I was afraid she'd faint before she got to the chair.

ANNA. Do you know you look just like a friend of mine who has been dreadfully ill—given up by five doctors.

HATTIE. I have had seven; but I am convinced that no physician can understand my case. It is peculiar.

JANE. That's so.

ANNA. Have you any appetite?

HATTIE. Not a particle. I can scarcely force myself to partake of even the smallest morsel of food.

ANNA. Hm! Just like my friend! And are you sleepy all the time? That was one of her worst symptoms.

HATTIE [*with animation*]. Very drowsy. I sometimes go to sleep sitting right in this chair.

ANNA. Hm! And do noises trouble you?

HATTIE. Perfect agony.

KATE. She notices every footfall.

JANE. And we never think of ringing the dinner-bell. I have to go all over the house in felt shoes and call the family to meals.

ANNA. Hm! It's a parallel case, I fear. And do you sometimes feel—oh—cold and creepy?

HATTIE. I am shivering now. [*KATE draws the shawl around her shoulders. JANE draws the curtains closer.*]

ANNA. Well, my friend was in just such a state as you describe, and no one thought she would ever be any better; but finally some doctor discovered a remedy that cured her in two weeks.

HATTIE. What was it? I have tried so many things in vain.

KATE. Do you suppose we could obtain the prescription?

ANNA. Oh, it's very simple. Come to think, I believe I have a little bottle of it in my satchel. My friend was so impressed with its efficacy that she gave me some to use in case of need. [*Crosses to table while speaking and opens satchel.*] Yes, here it is. How lucky! Would you like to try it, Hattie?

HATTIE. Oh, yes, I will try anything; though I fear I am past help.

KATE. This may be just what you need, Hattie.

JANE. It can't do any harm to try.

ANNA. Hand me a teaspoon, Jane. [ANNA stands at right of HATTIE, KATE at HATTIE'S left. JANE draws chair behind HATTIE, and standing on it looks over the back of HATTIE'S chair, with an expression of intense curiosity and amusement as the action proceeds. ANNA has some difficulty in getting the cork out of the bottle, but finally digs it out with a hairpin, talking all the time.] It isn't so very bad to take—— Well, I wonder who put this cork in, anyway. Think they'd better take it out themselves. Oh, there it comes! [Holds cork between teeth as she carefully drops medicine into spoon.] Now take it down quickly, Hattie. [Gives her the medicine and re-corks the vial.] There! you'll soon feel better. It was surprising how fast my friend improved.

[HATTIE leans back and closes her eyes. ANNA strokes her forehead, KATE fans her. JANE, arms akimbo, peers over the back of HATTIE'S chair into her face.]

HATTIE [opening eyes]. I am better already. What wonderful medicine! [JANE gives silent expression to extreme amusement.]

KATE. Did you ever take anything like it before?

HATTIE. No, never. It had a most peculiar taste.

KATE. It is some very rare drug, probably.

HATTIE. What is it called, Anna?

ANNA [looking at label of bottle]. It is—— Oh, Kate! Hattie! What have I done! What have I done!

ALL. What is it? What is it? [HATTIE starts forward.]

ANNA. Oh, I got the wrong bottle! I have given her a deadly poison! What shall I do? [JANE jumps down from chair. KATE screams.]

HATTIE. Poison! [Falls back in chair.]

KATE. Rub her hands! her feet! [Rubs vigorously.]

HATTIE. It is no use. [In a sepulchral tone.] Already I feel a strange sensation.

ANNA [reading rapidly from label]. "If the contents of this bottle are accidentally taken internally, administer *aqua saccharinus* immediately." Quick, Jane! Run to the drug-

store on the corner and get some *aqua saccharinu*s—fly! [JANE rushes out, but immediately returns to the door, where, unseen by HATTIE, she remains watching proceedings with silent mirth until summoned by ANNA.]

ANNA [reading]. "And keep the patient exercising vigorously until the effect wears off." Rub harder, Kate. Hattie, can't you move your arms? Do try!

HATTIE [waving arms energetically]. This way?

ANNA. Yes, that's good.

KATE. Now keep your head going so the poison can't settle on your brain.

[HATTIE moves head vigorously, keeping up the movement of arms. ANNA and KATE rub and thump her. ANNA gives signal to JANE, who rushes in, panting as if out of breath from running.]

ANNA. Quick, Jane, another spoon. Oh, you are almost saved, Hattie! [Administers antidote.] See if you can stand alone. [They assist her to rise.]

KATE. Now walk up and down. [HATTIE obeys, followed by ANNA and KATE, who express great amusement by gestures behind HATTIE's back. JANE dances about with delight.]

ANNA. Swing your arms—faster yet! Clap your hands! Oh, you are coming out of it all right! [JANE runs out and returns with the dinner-bell, which she rings loudly.]

HATTIE. Yes, yes, my head is clearer. I feel better and stronger than I have for weeks.

JANE. Does this disturb you?

HATTIE. I had not even noticed it.

ANNA. Good! Keep moving! [Throws her arms around HATTIE, sings the McGinty Schottische and makes her dance until both are out of breath.] Now, how do you feel?

HATTIE. I am all in a glow! And just feel my pulse! But, oh, Anna! what a narrow escape!

ANNA. Narrow escape? Not a bit of it! What do you think that poison was?

HATTIE. I suspect it was strychnine from the way it affected me. I felt —



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ANNA. It was nothing on earth but vinegar and water, and it didn't affect you at all — so, there!

HATTIE. Anna, what do you mean?

ANNA. Just that! And the antidote was sugar and water. Ask Kate and Jane. They are in the secret.

HATTIE. Then I only *imagined* those horrible sensations.

ANNA. Exactly so.

KATE. It was just a little stratagem, Hattie, to prove to you —

HATTIE. I understand it all. Can it be that I have been all along the victim of exaggerated fancies? But *this* is real. [Walks up and down.] I can stand alone; I can walk. [Stops in centre, front of steps.] I am *hungry*!

JANE. Hurrah for Dr. Anna! [Flourishes dinner-bell!]

JANE, ANNA, HATTIE, KATE.

CURTAIN.





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